Professional E-mail Etiquette

E-mail is one of the most commonly utilized tools of communication in the workplace and educational setting. It is amazing how long we've had this communication tool at our disposal and how communication has evolved because of it. Because e-mail use is so prevalent in our society, it is important that we use it responsibly.

There are many positive attributes of e-mail:
- Communication can take place with multiple people at once.
- Communication can take place almost immediately.
- Communication can be documented for future reference.
- Communication can be enhanced by the use of attachments.

There are also many negative attributes of e-mail:
- We no longer rely on the formal use of an initial greeting, proper grammar, correct spelling, correct use of punctuation, or even full spelling of a word or phrase (TMA- too many abbreviations)!
- Emotion does not translate in an e-mail no matter how many emoticons you use :(
- Too many "junk" e-mails or "spam" advertisements flood our in-boxes and waste valuable time.
- Personalization of the "hand-written" note has been lost to a more efficient form of technology.

Here are some tips and suggestions to improve your professional e-mail communication as adapted from U.S. News and World Report "*18 Common Work E-mail Mistakes*"

1. **Enter the e-mail recipient's address last**. In other words, type your e-mail, proof read, and be certain that the message is clear and correct before entering the recipient's address. This will help to avoid accidentally sending the e-mail to the wrong person, or sending an incomplete or inaccurate message.

2. **Don't forget the attachment!** There is nothing worse than referring to an attachment - which you have NOT attached. In addition, double-check that your attachment is the document that you intended to send. Make and save any changes prior to attaching the document to your e-mail. If you make changes to the version that's attached to the e-mail, the changes may not save.

3. **Be patient.** If your recipient does not immediately respond, please exercise some patience. There are other duties that must be done during the work day and your recipient will respond as soon as he or she is able or has information to provide.

4. **Know the e-mail policy of your company / school and don't violate it.** Reconsider forwarding e-mails that are not work related. Jokes, heartwarming stories, items that require you to send them to others for good luck etc...are neither appropriate nor professional e-mail communications. In addition, Baptist Health email policy strictly forbids this practice.

5. **Review all new e-mail messages before responding to any.** According to Andrew Rosen, US News and World Report, even though you were away, things do march on without

you. Therefore, rapidly replying to an email before you've read all your new e-mails may be irresponsible because it could create extra communication, confusion, and wasted time on a situation that has long ago been dealt with.

6. **Composing and sending an e-mail too quickly could wreak havoc on your professional demeanor and be embarrassing as well**. Write each e-mail conscientiously - careful with spelling, punctuation, and content. Be respectful and take pride in your communication. You never know when someone you are communicating with could be a very important person in your future career endeavors. Remember, a first impression only happens once!

7. **Greetings are important**. Always begin your e-mail with the person's name and include a simple greeting at the beginning and in closing.

8. **Never send an e-mail when you are angry or emotional in any way**. The best advice is to write a draft, do not include the recipient's address in the e-mail at this time (refer to # 1), sleep on it and read it the next day to determine if you still want to send.

9. **Use the subject line to your advantage**. This is the line that the recipient sees first and can help him or her determine the importance of a timely response. "Meaningful and descriptive" subject lines are advised. Also, for the sake of professionalism, if you are e-mailing the same individual but about a different topic, change the subject line or start a new e-mail thread altogether.

10. **Always put the e-mail in context**. For example, if you have previously discussed something with a co-worker or instructor, don't just start an e-mail where the conversation left off. Remind the recipient why you are sending the email to refresh the memory and to improve the professional tone of the communication.

11. **Be very careful with the "reply-all" button!** This is one of the most common unintentional mistakes that can carry a huge penalty. Depending on the content of the e-mail, you can lose professional credibility, relationships, or even your job.

12. **Identify yourself**. Make sure you identify yourself in your e-mail as not everyone will know you by your e-mail address.

13. **Use a professional e-mail address!** Make sure your e-mail address is age-appropriate and professional (i.e. wildthang2012@ yahoo... is not professional). A combination of your name / initials works best. Web-based e-mail accounts are usually free. It's recommended you create a new one in order to present a more professional image.

Reference:

Rosen, A. G. (2011) 18 Common Work E-mail Mistakes. In *U.S. News and World Report*. Retrieved January 15, 2014 from http://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/outside-voices-careers/2011/01/18/18-common-work-e-mail-mistakes